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Safe Schools: Ideas Book for Students

1994

Working for You - Working with You

**A Message from Dave Cooke,
Minister of Education and Training**

We all want Ontario schools to be safe, but sometimes violent incidents occur that interfere with work and learning and have a disturbing effect on both students and staff. Such incidents mustn't be allowed to happen, and the Government of Ontario has been looking at ways of making our schools violence-free. In June 1994 we issued a new policy that gives guidelines to school boards for handling and preventing violent incidents.

What we really need, though, is for the whole community to become involved. Making our schools safe will require everyone's help. Students themselves have an important role to play, and that's why the Safe School Task Force has produced this ideas booklet. It shows students how they can become involved and encourages them to be creative as we work together to make our schools safe. Parents and teachers of younger students may want to look through the booklet with them and discuss both the problems and possible solutions.

The Ministry of Education and Training has worked with the Safe School Task Force on several projects, and we are pleased to have collaborated with them on this ideas booklet for students.

Sincerely,

Dave Cooke
Minister of Education and Training
M.P.P. Windsor-Riverside

**A Message from Stuart Auty,
Chair of the Safe School Task Force**

102-06180/

Violence in our schools is not new, but the number of violent incidents is increasing, and they are becoming more serious. The Safe School Task Force was established in 1990 to develop programs to deal with this unacceptable increase in violence in Ontario schools.

As our first step in dealing with the problem of violence, we have to acknowledge that it exists. Then, we must really believe that we can make our schools safer.

We all share the responsibility of protecting everyone from violence as a result of school-related activities. We can't just ignore the problem and hope that our schools will magically become safer on their own. Instead, we must all roll up our sleeves and get down to work.

This booklet is full of ideas that can help prevent violence in our schools. Some of these ideas may work for you. If you find something you like, try it out. Experiment with different ideas and activities, adapting them to fit your own special circumstances. Think of new and different ways in which we can all work together to make our schools safer. It really is up to you to make it happen.

Sincerely,

Stuart Auty

P.S. – If you have any ideas or suggestions that you would like to share, or if you want more information on the Safe School Task Force, please contact me at:

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Developing a Safe School Student Committee

Getting Together

There are lots of things you can do to prevent violence in your school. But there is only so much that any one person can do – so you need to find a way for many different people to work together on common projects.

A Safe School Student Committee is one way to help bring people together to develop such projects and activities. There is no set formula for creating or running a Safe School Student Committee, so it's up to you to decide whether you want one, and, if you do, what it will look like and how it will operate.

If you decide to form a student committee, you can invite your school principal, other students, school support staff, teachers, community police, and local residents and business owners to help you put it together. After that, it will be up to

you to decide how your committee will work and what it will do.

Making Your Committee Work

Remember that your Safe School Student Committee exists to help make your school violence-free. How it does that will depend on the particular circumstances at your school. There is no single set of rules by which committees must operate, but there are some general approaches to committee organization that you might find helpful.

Give everyone a part to play: A Safe School Student Committee can work at any level of the school system, from kindergarten to the upper grades. Students from different grades should be assigned tasks and activities appropriate to their level. Try to ensure that all the grade levels at your school are represented on your committee, and remember that you all share the same goal – a violence-free school.

Reach out: The members of your committee are the key to its success. You need many different people to make it work. Don't limit your committee to those who volunteer at the start – go out and look for more members. Invite not only students who are already thinking about safe schools but also those who may not feel as strongly about the need for a committee. Different views will help you to see problems and solutions in new ways.

Build partnerships: Go outside your student body for help with your committee. Ask school administrators, teachers, and support staff for their ideas and support. It's up to you to decide who will sit on your committee. Look all around for people who can help. And don't forget to turn to the community for support and assistance when you need it.

Break it up: There are lots of things your committee can do to prevent violence in your school. The committee will work better and accomplish more if you break it up into subcommittees to take on special tasks. Those smaller groups can then report back to the full committee on their accomplishments.

Getting Things Done

In the end, the success of your Safe School Student Committee will depend on your ability to reach the goals you set along the way. The more of those goals the committee achieves, the more encouraged its members will be to continue, and the more effectively the committee will function.

How you make things happen will depend on the kinds of goals you set, but the following general tips can help all committees make the most of their good ideas.

Remember that success breeds success: Look for activities that will give committee members the opportunity to experience success and to feel the satisfaction of a job well done. One way to do this is to take on the easiest projects first. Gain some experience and learn from your successes before you tackle the "big jobs".

Set goals: If you don't really know what you want to accomplish, it will be hard to know when the job is done. That's why it's important to turn general ideas into specific goals, and to make sure that everyone understands and agrees on those goals.

Make sure everyone has a job to do: All of us have different strengths. Encourage all committee members to put their unique skills to work to make the project a success. Make room for everyone to become involved.

Define expectations clearly: Make sure committee members know what they need to do and when it needs to be done. The committee should keep track of key activities and have subcommittees and individuals report back regularly. Everyone should be ready to pitch in and help to get the job done.

Show and Tell

A job well done is worth a bit of a brag. Let others know that your Safe School Student Committee is making a difference. Tell them about how your efforts have helped to prevent violence in your school and your community. Share your experiences with others so that they can learn from your successes.

Even if your committee doesn't always reach its goals, you can still learn valuable lessons from its mistakes – lessons that will help you make future programs succeed.

You can also learn from others' successes and mistakes. Contact Safe School Student Committees at other schools to find out what they're doing. Ask them for any helpful hints they can offer based on projects they've done. Tell them about the successes and difficulties you've had with your own projects. Work together to solve common problems or to promote similar projects.

Don't forget to keep the students at your school informed about your committee's activities. Invite them to participate in any projects that directly affect them. Ask them for their opinions, and use surveys and questionnaires to find out what they expect from your committee. Listen to the concerns they voice, and always make an effort to act on those concerns. Use bulletin boards and pamphlets to let the student body know what you're doing to respond to their needs.

Safe School Projects for Secondary Schools

School Safety Audits: Taking Action for a Safer Future

We can all do some simple things to make our schools safer. One of the easiest ways to get started is to conduct a school safety audit.

Before you can develop solutions to the problem of violence at your school, you need to understand what is taking place in and around the school. A safety audit

can help you do that: It basically involves taking a close look at your school, the school grounds, and the neighbourhood, and thinking about the activities that take place there. If there have been episodes of violence, an audit can tell you where most of them have taken place, who has usually been involved, and what kinds of things have tended to trigger them. A school safety audit can produce a powerful "data base" that will allow a thorough identification of problem areas, so that those problems can be isolated and dealt with realistically.

Shine some light on problem areas: One of the first things to watch for when you conduct your audit is areas in which better lighting would help to reduce the opportunity for violence. Discuss the problem with your school principal and the maintenance staff, and, with their help, arrange for proper lighting to be installed in the areas that need it.

Learn from the past: Analyse any violent occurrences that have taken place during the past few years and chart the hot spots on a map of the school and the neighbourhood. Think about why disturbances take place in those areas rather than others. Research the causes behind the outbreaks, and try to find patterns. Talk with school personnel, your parents, and resource people within the community about your findings and about ways to prevent trouble before it starts.

Give special attention to "lonely" areas: Check buildings and school grounds for isolated or "lonely" areas in which individuals may be vulnerable to attack or abuse. Search for ways to make such areas more accessible and more visible – say, by trimming or removing bushes or by improving lighting. Post warnings in all isolated areas, and ask people to avoid them, if possible, when they are alone. In some cases, people won't be able to avoid these areas altogether, so it is important that the student population be well informed about general safety precautions and appropriate defensive behaviour.

Be prepared: There are ways in which we can all prepare ourselves to respond appropriately in potentially dangerous situations. Meet with your school principal or vice-principal and teachers to discuss what they are doing to teach students (and one another) how to recognize and avoid possible violence, and how to behave if confronted by violence.

Look beyond the gates: Trouble can travel. Take your safety audit outside the school buildings and off the property. Review the locations and causes of past violence in the vicinity, and encourage members of the community (parents, local business owners, residents) to work with the school to resolve existing and developing tensions in the area before they erupt into violence. Work out a phone chain or similar communication network for contacting and connecting community members.

Put it all together: A school safety audit can be as simple or as complex as you want to make it – remember, this is your audit, and you are in charge! Your Safe School Student Committee can conduct the audit, or you might want to form a separate audit committee. Make checklists of safety issues that you think should be reviewed. Assign specific tasks to subcommittees and individual committee members. Call all the members back together to analyse their reports. Then decide

how to make your school safer, and start working on specific activities.

Promoting Your Plan

Efforts to prevent violence and trouble before they have a chance to occur are "good news" stories. But good news rarely captures headlines or leads off the evening news. This means that we must sometimes make an extra effort to ensure that such stories are heard.

There are a number of things you can do to help make your community aware of the ways in which students, educators, administrators, parents, and other partners in your school are working to prevent potential violence. Collect some real-life stories about individuals in your school or your community who are working to make our schools safer. Write a story about their activities for your school newsletter, and send it out to a community newspaper or a television or radio station as well. Tell them why "good news" can be just as interesting as "bad news".

Invite the media to your school to see firsthand what you are doing to keep your school free of violence. If you have conducted a safety audit, take reporters on a tour of the areas you investigated and explain what you found out about how trouble starts and how it can be prevented in the future.

Write letters to the editors of local newspapers. Ask for an opportunity to appear on cable and local television and radio shows. Call in to talk shows to make your voice heard. Call a press conference to announce special "safe school" events or accomplishments. The opportunities are endless – you just need to use your imagination.

Put It on Tape

You don't have to be a movie star to be in a film. Use a home video recorder to make your own "movie" about the things you are doing to make your school safer.

Produce your own mini-documentary on your safety audit. Take a video camera with you when you investigate problem areas. Interview your safety-audit team while they are reviewing various areas of the school, the school grounds, and the neighbourhood.

You can also interview students, teachers, administrators, trustees, parents, and others, such as police liaison officers, who are working to keep violence out of our schools. They can tell some interesting stories and offer helpful hints on how to keep your school free of violence.

Once your video is finished, ask your teachers to show it in their classes. You can also give a copy to local cable television stations so that they can play it for the community. Send it to the other local stations as well. You never know – they may just decide to air it in prime time!

Safe School Projects for Elementary Schools

Know Your Neighbour

Your classroom is really a special kind of neighbourhood. It's a place where people from many different backgrounds share many experiences. It's like a small community in which you meet the same people day after day. You and your classmates work and play together, just as neighbours often do.

Some of the people in your class may be your best friends. There may be others whom you don't know as well. Some you may not know at all. But no matter how well you know each other, all of you – and all the students in your school — have something important that you can share with each other.

Get to know your neighbours in your school better. Work with your teacher to develop a class project that will help you and your classmates find out more about each other. For example, the whole class can write down some questions that everybody can answer — say, questions about safety in the school. Find out whether everyone feels safe both at school and in the schoolyard and the neighbourhood. Ask your classmates for ideas on how to make the school safer. Find out if they have ideas about how violence starts and how to stay out of trouble.

Once you have all gotten to know each other better, you can work together on some projects that will make your school safer. Ask yourselves how or why violence starts at your school and what you can do, both on your own and in groups, to stop trouble before it starts. Talk with each other about what you should do if you or one of your friends is threatened with violence. Work with your teachers and your parents to figure out the best ways to keep your classroom and your school free of violence.

Having Fun, Staying Safe

Staying safe is serious business, but that doesn't mean it can't also be fun. Try to think of games and other fun activities that could help you learn about safety and about how to handle situations that could become violent.

One game that might be fun uses a map of your school neighbourhood as the board. To start, draw all the buildings and streets in the neighbourhood on a big piece of poster paper. Circle and number all the areas where trouble has occurred or where you think it could occur.

Pick a circle on the map, then divide the class into two teams. The first team has to make up a story about a problem that could occur in the circled area. The area could be very dark, or it could be a place where bullies hang out and threaten people. It could also be a place where a lot of fights have taken place in the past. Think of all the different ways in which trouble could develop in the area.

The second team would then have to describe how they would deal with those

problems. Afterwards, both teams could work together to think of even more ways to avoid trouble in that spot.

Write your ideas down in a notebook. After you have covered all the areas circled on the map, review your book of ideas with your teacher and principal and work with them and your parents to find even more ways to make your school and your neighbourhood safer.

Call for Help

What would you do if you saw someone being threatened or attacked at school, in your neighbourhood, or at home? To whom would you go if someone threatened or hurt you? Do you know where to go or what number to call when you need help?

Once trouble starts, you need to be able to do something right away to get help. That's a lot easier to do if you know how to find help *before* there is a problem. The time you spend now planning how to respond to an emergency will be very helpful if you ever have to take quick action in the future.

Ask your teacher to work with your class to produce your own list of places to go and people to call in case you are ever in trouble. Think about all the different situations in which you might need help. Talk with your classmates about what they would do and whom they would want to call. Find out how to get assistance right away when you need it.

As you locate names, addresses, and phone numbers of people who can help in an emergency, you and your classmates can make a big wall poster listing them for everyone to see. Each of you can also make your own list to keep in your notebook, so that you would have it if you ever needed it.

Plays, Poems, and Pictures

Sometimes thinking and talking about safer schools in different ways can help us understand how to deal with violence and trouble in our schools better. Drawing a picture, writing a poem, designing a poster, putting on a play, taking a photograph, or writing a song can help us think about different ways to deal with trouble and violence. And it's all probably a lot easier to do than you imagine.

Think about the different ways you could tell a story about how you feel about your school and about making it a safer place for you and your friends. You could write a rap, rock and roll, or blues song. You could take pictures of places where violence occurred in the past. You could write a story about how violence affected someone you know. Or you could work with some friends to write and put on a play about how trouble was avoided at your school.

Whatever project you decide to do, the important thing is to show it to, or share it with, someone else. If you write a song, sing it with some friends to your class. If you make a poster, put it on the wall. Better yet, have a poster contest and put all of the posters up in the hallways. Make a photo album of the photographs you've

taken and share it with other classes in your school. Take it home to show your parents and neighbours as well. You can even share it with another school, either in your own neighbourhood or somewhere else in the province.

Sharing your poems, songs, artwork, and pictures with other schools is a good way to learn about each other and about different ways of preventing violence. Work with your teacher and your school principal to set up an exchange program with another school outside your own community. You can send each other your writings, drawings, and photographs. Find out whether you have shared some of the same problems in trying to make your schools safer. Ask the students at the other school how they deal with those problems. Tell them what you do. Think about the things they tell you, and decide whether those things would work for you.

Whatever project you decide to do, have fun doing it! And remember that it's important to let others know what you've done.

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